

Commission on Self-Represented Litigants

Informal Minutes from 11/23/04

The Commission met at 12:30 pm. All members were present. Peg Allison and Marilyn Hollister joined the group via videoconferencing, and Judge Fagg (still a guest at this point) participated via telephone conferencing. The remote access worked well, and all participants felt they could participate fully. Tammy Hinderman, reference librarian for the State Law Library, Ann Gilkey, Equal Justice Coordinator for the State Bar of Montana, and Tara Veazey, Montana Legal Services attorney, also joined us.

Judy Meadows reviewed for the Commission the tasks that were assigned to us at the Equal Justice Retreat in October:

1. No longer have Tara do the work of the commission (!!)
2. Pro Se Commission should become active, and it should educate, market, do outreach, and increase resources.
3. Provide forms and directions of where to obtain (by 6/05)
4. Development of Clerk's guidelines to providing information
 - a. Distribute and train court staff
 - i. District Court (by 6/05)
 - ii. Limited Court Judges (get on judges agenda for spring 2005 or spring 2006)
 - b. Make available to pro se litigants
 - c. Distribute to Tribal Courts

Tara Veazey discussed new forms that she has prepared for name changes and modification of parenting plans. She will send each Commission member a copy. Comments to the listserv will begin December 15th. If Commission members are not comfortable in their knowledge of the subject of the form, they will ask someone who has practiced in that area of the law. Our comments and requests for changes will be given to Tara no later than the end of January.

We discussed the importance of providing both context for the forms and definitions of the words used. Tammy is working on both, and seamless links will be made back and forth between MontanaLawHelp.com and the Law Library's website.

Guidelines for clerks of court on providing legal information v. legal advice were discussed. These will be drafted by Michele Snowberger, based on what other states have adopted, and posted to our listserv by the end of December. We will discuss through January, and approve at our February meeting.

We discussed gathering information about most commonly asked questions and those that are difficult to answer from all the clerks – both of district courts and courts of limited jurisdiction – and public libraries. We also will ask for copies of all brochures and forms they have prepared. Tammy will send a request out to the librarians, and Michele's Clerk with work with the other clerks to gather their information. We will use this to prepare the workshops we will give to the groups in 2005 and 2006.

The group discussed how difficult it is to accomplish significant goals with no resources or staff. Nonetheless, we are determined to undertake meaningful activities.

Judy updated the group on the prospective settlement with LegalZoom.com, which appropriated the Commission dissolution forms for commercial purposes. She and Judge Fagg will write a letter to the company requesting a settlement amount to be paid to the Montana Justice Foundation. This money could then be applied for by Montana Legal Services for work to benefit the Commission's activities.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 23rd at 1:30 pm.